

Q + A with Karin Jironet

Why the combination of Love + Power is the next big thing in leadership

What's changing about leadership today?

Today's leaders still need to lead collective effort towards a common goal. What's new is that to excel as a contemporary leader, they need to let go of traditional views on how best to lead and adopt a very different approach to how they make decisions and interact with colleagues.

With the enormous amount of often-conflicting information that leaders are exposed to, and the unpredictability of social and economic developments that define the business context, leaders often find themselves overwhelmed and torn as a result. In these situations, the tendency to focus on rationality rather than intuition actually impairs their ability to respond effectively.

So what can leaders do to avoid this?

The latest science shows that the universe is one unified whole: Cause and effect are inseparable. It is critical for modern leaders to bring this game-changing understanding into their methodology. Rather than trying to know or control everything, leaders need to trust the process implicitly and to maintain a state of flow as much as possible.

Adaptability is essential and the old-fashioned focus on differences— me versus you, ours versus theirs— is no longer useful. Allowing the starting point to be this notion of 'oneness' means leading for the benefit of the whole organization and even wider society, as well as its components. The feeling is similar to that in an intimate relationship: We are not in it for ourselves, or the other, but for the relationship itself.

What does this mean in practice for leaders?

Defining identity is increasingly important as we cease to define roles purely based on hierarchy. Today we have a much more flexible labor market, with freelancers, part-time employees and career breaks becoming more common and shorter-term, project-based engagement. Getting that golden watch at retirement is a thing of the past. What makes up your identity—at work or elsewhere— is self-realization. When others perceive you and your true self as one and the same, success follows naturally. No hierarchy can do that for you.

Now, the unique qualities and talents you bring to the table are much more relevant. In the future, we will see less uniformity and more room—even need—for craftsmanship, artistry and other forms of creative expression in the labor market, and no space for mediocrity or a lack of self-awareness.

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What is the role of a contemporary leader?

The job itself is the same as ever: leading a group of individuals towards a common goal. The biggest challenge—and perhaps the role of the contemporary leader—is to be fully involved and present while trusting people to do their jobs. This requires confidence. I’m not talking about ego, or confidence in something or someone specific. No, just confidence. Trust.

Can you provide an example of this style of leadership?

Recently I’ve advised on major changes at a large, prestigious hospital that has faced significant challenges: merger, relocation, financial turmoil, changes at the top, bad publicity, you name it. Still, it is consistently rated as the best hospital in that country by public opinion polls. Why?

One manager insists that their staff say ‘hello’ when they meet one another—a real hello, eye contact and all. A genuine greeting becomes culture. Another manager enthusiastically created collaborations across disciplines and departments, resulting in breakthrough research. A third developed a cutting-edge curriculum for clinical leadership based on ‘reversed learning.’ But mainly it’s because they have a CEO who takes the time to express, discuss and clarify issues with his colleagues through focused attention and one-on-one or small-group conversations. This CEO views his job as the creation of a safe, intimate, respectful space, by trust and discernment—by using love.

What do you mean by “love?”

Love, in the context of leadership, means allowing employees to experience authenticity in the workplace. Love has been proven to be enormously empowering and beneficial to both leaders and employees. Leaders create a sense of mutual respect and autonomy when they recognize their people know more about the detail of a situation and trust them to handle it. Rather than feeling watched and doubted, employees feel more authentic and trusted. This approach forges far stronger loyalty and investment than excessive control or hierarchical frameworks ever could.

Love brings with it a sense of generosity—not of self-sacrifice, but of giving for the greater good and having the emotional maturity to stand for something or someone without expecting anything back. Love benefits everyone—including the organization itself.

New Definition: POWER

The ability to surrender personal power or ego and open up to complex patterns of interconnection and intuition, such as trust.

What are the key assets leaders need to be using right now?

There are two fundamental human qualities leaders must adopt and integrate: love and power. Leading with love means fostering a sense of mutual trust, respect, openness, authenticity and connection between colleagues and employees at all levels. Instead of trying to do everything yourself—which reflects a lack of trust—you invite employees with greater specific knowledge of the situation in question to handle it. Communication is clear and honest and always supportive and positive. Rather than suppressing individual qualities, love allows a leader to encourage individuals to carry out their roles with a sense of authenticity.

Doesn't power contradict leading with love?

No. Not all. But it might appear to. Power might seem a fairly obvious quality when we're talking about leadership. But I don't mean the well-known, primarily Western notion of power as a span of control. I mean power in the contemporary interpretation—the ability to surrender personal power or ego and open up to complex patterns of interconnection and intuition, such as trust. Once mastered, this saves an enormous amount of time and energy. Leaders urgently need to start consciously operating from a foundation of love and this new definition of power.

What is the major challenge confronting today's leaders?

To contribute positively to the global process, leaders need to move away from existing colonial or hierarchical governance models. These were defined by exploitation, domination, self-serving fascination and a patronizing sense of distance. There was no willingness to understand or love – only to profit. It's clear now that this approach is extremely outdated, and companies and leaders who still subscribe to it are already suffering.

We are shifting towards a global and multicultural model informed by coexistence, diversity, connection and relationships—qualities that are often associated with more modern, open, and ultimately human ways of governing. The key question leaders should be asking themselves right now is, "How can I harness love and power to be a better leader?"

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